

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02

INR-09 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6399
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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E. O. 11652: NA

TAGS: EAGR, CH

SUBJ: PRC WEATHER CAUSES DROUGHT AND APPREHENSION

SUMMARY: THE WEATHER CONTINUES TO CAUSE APPREHENSION AMONG PRC LEADERS WHO ARE MUCH CONCERNED ABOUT THE EFFECTS THAT SUCCESSIVE YEARS OF BELOW AVERAGE HARVESTS COULD HAVE ON THE ECONOMY AND PARTICULARLY ABOUT THE WINTER WHEAT CROP. ITS PROSPECTS MAY BE SOMEWHAT POORER THAN THEY WERE AT THE SAME PERIOD IN 1972. THE POSSIBILITY THAT PRC MAY SUFFER ANOTHER DROUGHT, ESPECIALLY IN NORTHERN CHINA, SHOULD NOT BE MINIMIZED, BUT IT IS TOO EARLY TO PREDICT THE OUTCOME OF THE WINTER HARVEST AT THIS STAGE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE WEATHER IN CHINA CONTINUES TO CAUSE APPREHENSION AMONG THE PRC' S LEADERS. PROVINCIAL RADIO BROADCASTS CONTAIN NUMEROUS REFERENCES TO DROUGHT AND THE NEED TO PREPARE AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF NATURAL DISASTERS. A JAPANESE CONGEN COUNT TALLIES WITH OUR THAT THERE ARE REPORTS OF DROUGHT FROM 14
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PROVINCES IN THE NORTHERN TIER, MOSTLY IN THE WINTER AND SPRING WHEAT BELTS. OTHER QUALIFIED OBSERVERS HERE AGREE THAT THE REFERENCES ARE BOTH MORE NUMEROUS AND MORE SERIOUS- SOUNDING THAN LAST YEAR AT THIS TIME. SHANTUNG' S DESCRIPTION OF ITS SITUATION IS ONE OF THE MOST DIRE; IT SAYS THAT RAINFALL HAS BEEN LESS THAN NORMAL AND THE TEMPERATURE HAS RISEN EARLIER THAN USUAL (RS MARCH 15). DESPITE RELATIVELY GOOD RESULTS IN FARMLAND CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION DURING THE WINTER, LAST YEAR' S SERIOUS DROUGHT AND DRY SPELLS HAVE REDUCED THE AMOUNT OF WATER STORED IN SOME PLACES AND LOWERED THE WATER TABLE IN OTHERS. AS A RESULT, THE RESUMPTION OF GROWTH " IN MOST LOCALITIES" IN SHANTUNG IS NOT AS GOOD AS IN THE SAME PERIOD IN 1972 (RS MARCH 11). MOST OTHER NORTHERN PROVINCES REPORT THEIR PROBLEMS IN SIMILAR BUT LESS GRAVE TERMS, AND THE COUNTER- MEASURES RANGE FROM REAL EFFORTS SUCH AS SMALL WATER CONSERVANCY WORKS AND DEEP MACHINE- PUMPED WELLS THAT COULD PAY OFF THIS SEASON ALL THE WAY TO EXHORTATIONS TO GREATER EFFORTS OF ALL SORTS.

2. THUS, IT APPEARS THAT PROSPECTS FOR THIS YEAR' S WINTER WHEAT CROP AT THIS TIME MAY BE SOMEWHAT POORER THAN FOR THE SAME TIME IN 1972 WHEN WHEAT WAS REPORTED DOING WELL (NCNA, 2-29-72) AND SOIL MOISTURE WAS LATER DESCRIBED AS " ADEQUATE" IN BOTH NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN CHINA (NCNA, 3-19-72).

3. WHILE THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE PRC MAY SUFFER ANOTHER DROUGHT IN 1973, ESPECIALLY IN NORTHERN CHINA, SHOULD NOT BE MINIMIZED, WE FEEL IT IMPORTANT TO PUT THE WEATHER PICTURE, AS WE SEE IT, INTO SOME PERSPECTIVE. WINTER WHEAT, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE WINTER GRAIN CROPS, ACCOUNTS FOR SOME 90 PERCENT OF TOTAL WHEAT OUTPUT BUT ONLY FOR ABOUT 10 TO 15 PERCENT OF TOTAL GRAIN OUTPUT. SINCE THE HARVEST OF WINTER GRAINS IS THE FIRST MAJOR HARVEST OF THE YEAR, BELOW AVERAGE WINTER WHEAT HARVEST WOULD PLACE AN ADDITIONAL STRAIN ON GRAIN SUPPLIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE NORTH.

4. IT IS, HOWEVER, TOO EARLY TO BE PAINTING TOO GLOOMY PICTURE OF THE WINTER HARVEST AT THIS STILL EARLY DATE ON THE BASIS OF THE REPORTS OF WINTER DROUGHT. THE WINTER MONTHS ARE THE DRY SEASON IN THE NORTH, AND PRECIPITATION DURING THIS TIME ACCOUNTS FOR ONLY ABOUT 5 PERCENT OF ANNUAL PRECIPITATION. MOREOVER, THE LACK OF PRECIPITATION DURING THE WINTER MONTHS NORMALLY HAS LITTLE IMMEDIATE EFFECT ON THE PLANTS BECAUSE THEY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ARE THEN IN THE DORMANT STAGE. OF MORE IMPORTANCE COULD BE

THE LACK OF ADEQUATE SNOW COVER TO PROTECT THE OVER- WINTERING PLANT FROM WINTER KILL. A STUDY OF THE WEATHER DATA MADE AVAILABLE TO THE CONGEN BY THE HONG KONG ROYAL OBSERVATORY FOR THE WINTER MONTHS OF 1972-73 (DECEMBER AND JANUARY) IN COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS YEARS REVEALS THAT THE PAST WINTER WAS NO DRIER THAN THAT OF LAST FEW PRIOR YEARS. WE MIGHT NOTE HERE THAT 1971-72 WEATHER WAS BETTER THAN NORMAL FOR THESE MONTHS BUT BEGAN TO DETERIORATE AFTER MID- MARCH. WE BELIEVE THE REGIME' S PRIMARY CONCERN IS THE LOW SOIL MOISTURE IN AREAS THAT SUFFERED FROM SEVERE DROUGHT LAST YEAR. IF THE WINTER DROUGHT SHOULD CONTINUE INTO THE SPRING, THE SCANTY SOIL MOISTURE COULD HAVE DELETERIOUS EFFECTS ON BOTH THE WINTER CROP AS IT EMERGES FROM DORMANCY AND RESUMES GROWTH AND ON SPRING SOWING. MOREOVER, IT APPEARS THAT THE DROUGHT- STRICKEN AREAS ARE CONFINED MAINLY TO NORTH CHINA WHERE IRRIGATION FACILITIES ARE LACKING OR POORLY DEVELOPED.

5. SOME PRC REPORTS REFER TO THE MUCH LOWERED WATER TABLE IN SOME NORTHERN AREAS. WITH A LOW WATER TABLE IT WOULD BECOME MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE PEASANTS TO TAP UNDERGROUND WATER SOURCES IN CASE OF A DROUGHT. AND IN CASE OF A DROUGHT OF LAST YEAR' S INTENSITY, NORTH CHINA DEFINITELY WOULD BE IN A MORE VULNERABLE POSITION THAN IN 1972.

6. THE REGIME IS QUITE OBVIOUSLY VERY MUCH CONCERNED WITH THIS YEAR' S WINTER WHEAT CROP AND SPRING SOWING AND THE EFFECTS THAT SUCCESSIVE YEARS OF BELOW AVERAGE GRAIN HARVESTS COULD HAVE ON THE ECONOMY. IN LIGHT OF PEKING' S WHOLE PLANT IMPORT PLANS IT OBVIOUSLY SHOULD WISH TO ECONOMIZE AS MUCH AS IT CAN ON GRAIN IMPORTS. THAT AND HIGH WORLD MARKET PRICES LEND EXTRA IMPETUS TO THE DRIVE TO EXTRACT MAXIMUM EFFORTS FROM THE PEASANTS IN ORDER TO SECURE AS GOOD A HARVEST AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE.

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